

EXHIBIT DD



ENTERTAINMENT

Schlepping toward ecstasy

By **Reed Tucker**

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Jesse Eisenberg plays a hasid who gets caught up in a drug smuggling ring.

Even for a ruthless drug kingpin, Sean Erez had gone too far.

The Israeli mobster was running a modest ecstasy smuggling ring in the late 1990s when he had a multimillion-dollar idea. To smuggle his pills into New York's JFK Airport, he'd turn to couriers who were completely unlikely to arouse customs officers' suspicions: young Hasidic Jews, mainly from Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Borough Park.

Erez and other dealers had previously recruited strippers from local clubs (including Scores) as their mules. For one thing, the dealers liked having an excuse to hang out with strippers. For another, they figured pretty, D-cupped girls could flirt their way through customs. Soon, however, the cops got wise to the scheme.

So Erez ultimately turned to the Hasids, and built an empire in which more than 750,000 pills were smuggled in from illegal factories in Holland by Orthodox, plain-dressing Jews. But it was not a business model of which Erez's criminal brethren approved.

"There had been a lot of talk among the [Israeli] gangsters in the States that he was taking it too far," says Lisa Sweetingham, author of "Chemical Cowboys: The DEA's Secret Mission to Hunt Down a Notorious Ecstasy Kingpin." A week before the DEA arrested Erez in Holland, the agency got word from an informant that he was to be killed for using Hasids. Going to jail ultimately saved his life.

The story is so fantastical, it sounds like a movie script. And now it is.

This weekend's "Holy Rollers" tells a similar story about Hasidic drug smugglers. Sam (Jesse Eisenberg) lives a sheltered existence in Borough Park with his strict, religious family. When a rebellious neighbor (Justin Bartha) offers him a chance to travel to Europe and make some money by picking up a package, Sam jumps at the chance. He is at first frightened by the outside world, but ultimately falls in love with a lavish lifestyle that has him flying to Europe, partying in Amsterdam clubs and, most forbidden of all, getting close to non-Jewish women.

"All these people that tripped on ecstasy — if they knew where it came from," says Danny Abeckaser, who plays drug kingpin Jackie in "Holy Rollers" and also first conceived of the idea for the film after seeing a TV piece on the real smugglers.

"It seemed like such a fascinating story in its concept," says director Kevin Asch. "The juxtaposition of the community and crime and nightclubs and smuggling drugs — it's like, whoa!"

"Holy Rollers" is set in Borough Park, but was filmed mostly in Williamsburg (including Lee Avenue) for logistical reasons. In one part, Eisenberg's character becomes a neighborhood pariah after word gets out what he does for a living. The filmmakers shot the scene, in which Eisenberg attracts angry stares while walking down the street, without having to cast any extras. They simply turned on the camera; the glares were real.

"Our location manager was quite clear that we shouldn't be shooting in the community at all until the last day. You just don't know what the reaction will be," Asch says. "He was walking down the street being filmed, and they're all looking at him like, 'What are you doing?'"

The story of Hasidic smugglers is not one the community would like to revisit. "What I'd heard through various sources was that for many of the couriers, it was a shameful experience in their life and they've tried to move on," Sweetingham says.

Erez's right-hand man was Shimon Levita, a teen member of the Bobover sect. He became involved in the ring in October 1998, and eventually moved to Amsterdam, shedding all the outward trappings of his conservative Jewish faith. Levita helped recruit other mules from Brooklyn, and Erez paid them about \$1,500 per trip to carry in tens of thousands of pills. (In contrast, the strippers were paid between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per run.) Most had never been on a plane before. The drugs were hidden loosely in rolled-up socks or beneath false bottoms in suitcases, and often, the naive new recruits had no idea what they were carrying. They were told they were smuggling diamonds.

Levita was arrested and sentenced to 30 months in 2000. By 2003, he was in a Brooklyn halfway house before a full release. Neither Sweetingham nor officials involved in the case know where he is now.

Even though they comprised an international smuggling ring, the mules never seemed to be anything other than normal Hasids. One woman was arrested in Canada after refusing to take a bus on the Sabbath, giving police extra time to catch up with her. An 18-year-old concealing 30,000 pills in his suitcase made sure to order the kosher meal on a plane. And a Far Rockaway couple was arrested in France carrying 80,000 pills while on their honeymoon.

The final irony is that most of those in the community upon which "Holy Rollers" centers will never see the film. They're generally forbidden from watching TV or going to the cinema.

reed.tucker@nypost.com

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